



STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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TOM LUNA
STATE SUPERINTENDENT
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

MEMO

To: Superintendents, Charter School Administrators, and Principals

From: Tom Luna, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Date: December 17, 2012

Re: School Safety and Security

The recent tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut is a stark reminder that no community is immune to random acts of violence. My thoughts and prayers are with the victims of the Sandy Hook incident and their families; I know yours are too. As school leaders, it is critical that we do all we can to prevent violence in our schools and are prepared to respond.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time our country and our schools have had to address these safety and security concerns. When I took office in 2007, our nation was still reeling from a tragedy that took place in a rural Amish community in Pennsylvania. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of school vulnerabilities and readiness to respond to crisis, we secured funding from the Idaho Legislature to conduct a statewide school safety and security assessment in Fall 2007. This assessment included surveys, site visits, focus groups and community meetings. Although some results were concerning (lack of training and resources, inability to control access to buildings, outdated / inoperable security equipment), a very promising and not surprising finding emerged: school personnel and communities are highly supportive and understanding of the need to address security and make safety improvements in our schools.

Based on the results of the assessment, the state worked closely with local school districts to develop recommendations and improve safety and security for all students. Here are just some of the steps we took at that time:

- Convened a stakeholder group to establish a crisis response template for Idaho schools based on best practices.
- Delivered statewide training for school personnel on creating and implementing crisis response plans, threat assessments, de-escalation and student health and safety.
- Worked with vendors to leverage reduced costs for statewide security equipment purchases for Idaho schools.
- Partnered with the Bureau of Homeland Security to incorporate County Emergency Coordinators in school crisis response planning efforts.
- Required updated crisis response for districts receiving funding for Safe and Drug Free Schools.
- Established safety and security recommendations for new school construction.

In 2008, many of you used these recommendations to take a closer look at your school safety procedures and protocols. Now is a good time to work with your communities and address these

processes again. Here are some steps I would encourage you to take today in working with your educators, parents and community members.

- First, I encourage you to reach out to parents and explain what is in place currently to protect students.
- Second, please review your current crisis response plan and see if updates need to be made. Call the local first responders in your area and other stakeholders to see if they have feedback on the current plan or suggestions for updates that need to be made. In 2008, the state did form the School Safety and Security Stakeholder Group to design a crisis response plan template and supporting documents for Idaho schools to update their crisis response plans based on best practices. The template and documents are all available online at http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/safe_secure/.
- Third, just as important as being prepared to respond to crisis is implementing proactive measures to prevent a crisis. The State Department of Education has research and guidance on comprehensive, school-wide prevention programs, training documents, policy examples and case law history on a range of school climate issues such as bullying, harassment, drug and alcohol use, truancy, weapons on campus and suicide prevention, which can be accessed online at http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/safe_drugfree/data_resources.htm. In addition to this information, Idaho also has recently activated a suicide prevention hotline, staffed by trained professionals and intended for persons at risk for suicide. Please make sure your staff knows about this resource. More information is available online at <http://www.idahosuicideprevention.org/#&panel1-1>.

Incidents like the one at Sandy Hook Elementary quickly bring issues of school safety to the forefront; in the aftermath of a tragedy we never want to look back and ask ourselves, *"Could we have done more, or should we have done more?"* In light of this, the Idaho State Department of Education will reconvene the School Safety and Security Stakeholder Group in January 2013 to discuss school safety and security and next steps going forward.

Thank you for your work supporting the success and safety of Idaho students. My staff and I stand ready to assist your efforts. If you have any questions, please contact Matt McCarter at mamccarter@sde.idaho.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Luna', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Tom Luna
Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction